

Turning to the Door of Election

Romans 9:6-13

How can it be that the descendants of such historically significant people as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could fail so conspicuously?

From that family arose many of the Arab nations through Ishmael, and the people of Moab, Ammon and Edom. And not only do the Jews and Muslims count Abraham as a father, so do Gentile Christians in Paul's book to the Galatians and Romans.

And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:29)

So here is the problem before us in this most controversial chapter in the Bible. If God's salvation is so sure, as we just saw in Romans 8; and so many Israelites are lost in their sins, as Paul weeps over them, as Jesus wept over them, has the Word of salvation then – the Word of God – failed?

Israel is the special family chosen of God to bring the book of God, bring the message of salvation, bring the Savior Jesus to the world. How can they not be saved then? Shouldn't we expect many of them to be saved? And if they are not, then the fault must be in the infallible Word of God! Can the infallible promise of God fail?

God has so uniquely given privileges to Israel. Their privileges are never denied or doubted. We heard them last week in verses 4-5.

But these privileges do bring us into the heart-breaking problem – not with God's Word, but with unbelief and arrogance.

The privileges of Abraham's covenant are different from the far greater blessing of salvation revealed to Abraham.

Israel had failed when they made privileges into salvation itself. Because they were children of Abraham, circumcised, of the nation of Israel, they were therefore saved and going to heaven.

It is just like someone saying I am a Presbyterian, I have been baptized as an infant, and raised in the church, therefore I am saved.

Paul is going to straighten us out then.

Number One: It is not as though God's Word failed, or withered. Think of an old, rotting orange on the tree, ready to drop off by a little breeze. That is the picture here.

It is impossible that the gospel brought to our world through the Jews in Jesus the Son of God, could be a failure in this way.

Not at all! All who believe that Gospel are saved!

But that was not the Gospel believed by Paul or his brothers in the flesh.

They said all Israel must be saved; that is all the physical children of Abraham are called his children – and how can any of these children be lost? They are chosen, called and in covenant with God by circumcision; they are the Lord's forever.

The Jews of the first century believed being in Abraham's family means their salvation. They held to an external and fleshly connection.

They believed in some way what a later Rabbi would teach:

Said R Levi, ‘In the age to come Abraham will sit at the gate of Gehenna [hell], and he will not permit a circumcised Israelite to go down there.

Now all the preachers of the NT – all of them Jews – went after that error with all their might as we will see in a moment.

But here Paul sets forth an *undisputable fact*: not all who are in Israel are of Israel. Not all descendants of Jacob have the same faith, same repentance, same salvation as did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!

See this in what Paul begins to describe in verse 7. Here he is proving his thesis – not everyone in Israel is saved, for some of them, many of them, are not of Israel’s faith, repentance, and ultimately, election.

Look at Abraham. He had children who were not of promise. Only in Isaac your seed shall be called. That means not Ishmael, a son of Abraham!

Look at Isaac. He had children who were not elect! Esau who had the better privilege as the older son was not blessed.

Notice that all of these – Ishmael, Isaac, Esau and Jacob – all were circumcised!

If you are saying, as the Jews were in Paul’s day that to be a child of Abraham is your golden ticket to heaven – the Bible says Ishmael was not, and Esau was not! They had their tickets. They were not part of the family!

And Israel did not merely fall short of believing the gospel, believing Jesus was the Messiah. They were believing, as we shall see, a false gospel which inoculated them from the truth. They took the vaccine of

self-righteousness and refused the true Savior when he came according to the Scriptures.

Now Paul stands upon the true Word which cannot fail, wither or drop. There are three powerfully connected elements of the Word here – faith, calling, and especially election. Notice the contrast of the falling Word in verse 6 to verse 11 – the purpose of God that stands is election, or choosing.

All the elect, all the chosen are called and miraculously converted; all the called believe as Abraham did. This is to be of Isaac! And to be of Israel.

But the Jews held a false way, a false salvation, a false gospel.

Not faith, but works – mentioned in 11 and expanded in 30-32

Not calling by the mercy of a sovereign God, but the flesh, circumcision – verse 8. Look at verse 16.

It is not merely having the Word on your bookshelf but the Word of life saving you. Not being an Israelite physically, but spiritually; not being a descendent of Abraham as Ishmael; not being a child of flesh but rather than of promise – 8. In short, it is being a supernatural child like Isaac, born of a poor 90 year old mother, a miracle child – the child of the Spirit.

Paul addressed this in Romans 4: Abraham's faith was in a God who raised the dead, who calls out of his own dead body and deadness of his wife's womb, tied to the coming Seed and Savior who arose from the cross and the grave the third day, delivered for our sins and raised for our justification.

I said before that the NT preachers dismantled the false hope. John the Baptist said God could make children of Abraham out of rocks! Paul clung to his heritage in Philippians 3 but threw it away for Christ's righteousness. And our Lord Jesus in John 8 says straight up – you are NOT Abraham's children but children of the Devil!

Now good friends, aren't you glad we have this all straightened out? That this ancient problem was just a Jewish one from 2000 years ago?

Jews to this day insist they are part of God's family in Abraham – they are different, privileged, chosen. End of the discussion. You just need to understand that!

But the same can be found in Roman Catholicism. They believe all children are born again in their baptism – they are going to heaven.

Or consider some of the cults like the Church of Christ or Campbellites – who say you are saved by being converted and baptized in their church. There were no saved people before the 1830's!

In his beautiful little book called *Right with God*, by John Blanchard – the author spends time on four Failures men turn to as false Gospels.

Race – a Failure.

Ritual – a Failure.

Religion – a Failure.

Respectability – a Failure.

Paul trusted all of these – a Hebrew of the Hebrews, there's race; circumcised the 8th day, there's his ritual; a Pharisee, strictest sect of

his Religion; and he was blameless touching the law, his Respectability.

But he found that what things he brought to the table to God as winning him a place, were all rubbish so as to win Christ! Christ is our new race, our new humanity; our ritual is what he did for us on the cross and rising for us to heaven; our religion is a personal relationship with the triune God through Him according to the Word of God alone; and He is our respectability, our righteousness, and more – our wisdom, our sanctification, our redemption, our glory.

Are we truly Christians, are we truly children of the living God by His Son; or are we only Cultural Christians? Christian in name only?

What is a true Christian? Listen to these four answers from James Boice:

A Christian **believes** in Christ – he or she trusts in Jesus as Savior and Lord; looks away from self to the Savior of sinners; no righteousness of our own; but his alone. Grace is over them as the life-blood of their new existence in him forever.

A Christian **follows** Christ – they love Jesus and do his commands; not perfectly but they count him and his word to be their Master and Commander. Their banner is, “Not my will but yours be done!” by His Spirit. Spurgeon said: “What Jesus loves, we Love; what Jesus hates, we Hate; what Jesus seeks, we Seek; what Jesus shuns, we Shun. This is true friendship when there is but one heart between two bodies.”

A Christian **grows** in Christ – he or she is disciple, a learner, one who is maturing for heaven; more like Jesus, conformed to the Holy Bible,

in thought, word and deed. A Christian serves others for Christ – JOY – Jesus first, Others second, yourself last.

A Christian witnesses to Christ – must make him known; “Christ has taken our nature into heaven to represent us, and has left us on earth with his nature to represent him.” John Newton

We have come now to the door of election, to predestination. Here is a preview for next week:

“In predestination we see the everlasting love of God to and his most free choice of his people, to be his special and peculiar treasure. What doctrine is more humbling, emptying and therefore sanctifying, than predestination? It lays the axe at the root of all human boasting. In the light of this truth, the most holy believer sees that there is no difference between him and the vilest sinner that crawls the earth, but what the mere grace of God has made.” Octavius Winslow

See you then!